

Plum Island



An Island of National Significance

Plum Island is a perfect candidate for preservation under President Biden's America the Beautiful campaign. Located off Orient Point, New York, in eastern Long Island Sound, Plum Island already is owned by the federal government, but it needs permanent protection. Over 600 acres of this 822-acre island have been protected from development for decades only because they buffer a high security federal laboratory, soon to be decommissioned. The restricted human presence has promoted ecological diversity, and the island has become home to 111 at-risk species, including birds, plants, and insects. Thousands of endangered Roseate Terns forage in the waters around Plum Island and take shelter on its rocky shores. And the island is home to one of the largest seal haul-outs in southern New England. Plum Island is a key component of one of the very last large, wild coastal systems in the highly urbanized Long Island Sound/Peconic Estuaries, two of only 28 National Estuaries.



Plum Island tells America's story. Its future is in federal hands.

A History of National Importance

Plum Island's history reflects our nation's remarkable history in a microcosm, from its use for millennia by Native Americans, colonial farmers and lighthouse keepers, to its unique roles in the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, World Wars, and now as a foreign animal disease research center. So much has yet to be learned and shared about the ways in which the island has been used by people since it was formed by the last retreat of the Wisconsin glacier.

Today, the 1869 Plum Island Lighthouse still stands watch over the racing waters of Plum Gut and its fishermen. And a dozen brick structures from Fort Terry, an excellent example of an Endicott period coast defense installation, still stand. Both the Plum Island Lighthouse and Fort Terry are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Saved from the Auction Block, Primed for Preservation

In 2008, language in the Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance and Continuing Appropriations Act had the effect of endangering the island to the risks of development through a sale to the highest bidder. The Preserve Plum Island Coalition (PPIC) formed in response and fought hard to reverse that potentially damaging action.

Challenged by Congress to do so, the PPIC brought together stakeholders from throughout the region in 2018 and 2019 to create a unified vision, published in summer 2020, for the future of the island. Congress responded positively in December 2020 by repealing language that previously had committed Plum Island to the public sale. With true conservation still uncertain, PPIC now is working toward a transfer of Plum Island from its current owner, the Department of Homeland Security, which is planning to excess the island, to another federal agency for the purpose of permanent protection. A National Monument or other form of federal conservation would realize most elements of the region's vision of ecological conservation, historical preservation, and the discovery and celebration of Indigenous cultural heritage.

